Proclus' Multi-Level Ontology: The Meaning of Monads vs. A Tale Told by Thomists

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In a recent article,[1] I argued that Aquinas' understanding of beings (*entia*) as participants of *esse* and God, as unparticipated *esse* itself, is closely parallel, indeed virtually identical, to Proclus' triadic structure of participating, participated, and unparticipated terms, concluding that in this respect Aquinas' doctrine of God as *ipsum esse*, and the reasoning that underlies it, are altogether Platonic and Procline. For Proclus, in every case, a multiplicity of participated terms is distinguished from and in this sense derives from an unparticipated monad just in that each participated term is "diminished" relative to the monad by belonging uniquely to its participant. In the supreme case, since all things whatsoever participate the character one, it follows that all things derive from unparticipated one itself, which is to all things absolutely as every monad is to its proper order. So, for Aquinas, all things whatsoever participate *esse*, and the *esse* of each thing is "contracted" to its participant. Hence all things are posterior to and in that sense derive from unparticipated *esse* itself, or God.

Toward the end of that article I observed that the greatest difference between Aquinas and Proclus in this regard is that for Proclus the pattern of unparticipated monad and participated multiplicity repeats itself at many ontological levels, while Aquinas locates all Proclus' monads in God, where they are not really distinct from each other or from *ipsum esse*. Thus, whereas for Aquinas the only subsistent realities are created

1 Eric D. Perl, "Lessened by Addition: Procession by Diminution in Proclus and Aquinas," *Review of Metaphysics* 72 (2019): 685-716.

Dionysius, Vol. XXXVIII, December 2020, 143-167.

sensible substances, created angelic intelligences,[2] and God or *ipsum esse subsistens*, Proclus lays out an array of distinct causal principles—being, life, intellect, soul, and nature, each with further articulations within itself—ontologically intermediate between the sensible cosmos and the absolutely simple first principle or one itself. Most discussions of this difference have proceeded from a Thomist perspective, accepting Aquinas' presentation and critique of the Platonists at face value and often celebrating him for overcoming or eliminating such Platonic intermediaries, while seldom if ever engaging closely with the works of Proclus or other Platonists themselves.[3] The present study, on the other hand, undertakes an examination of Proclus' system on its own terms, both showing that the Thomistic critique is based on a misunderstanding and offering a more adequate account of the grounds and meaning of Proclus' multi-level ontology.

I

Proclus' system, as is well known, displays a "fractal" structure, in which the same monad-multiplicity pattern repeats itself, level within level, at greater and lesser degrees of "magnification."[4]

2 Which, since they play no ontological or causal role in relation to sensible things, can be conveniently dismissed or ignored by those Thomists who find angels an embarrassment to the Angelic Doctor.

3 See Anton C. Pegis, "The Dilemma of Being and Unity," in *Essays in Thomism*, ed. Robert E. Brennan (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 151-183, esp. 158, 174-178; Arthur Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949), 44-52; Cornelio Fabro, "The Overcoming of the Neoplatonic Triad of Being, Life, and Intellect by Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic O'Meara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 100-108; W. Norris Clarke, "The Problem of the Reality and Multiplicity of Divine Ideas in Christian Neoplatonism," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, 109-127, esp. 121-123; Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 117-123.

4 See Laurence Jay Rosán, *The Philosophy of Proclus: The Final Phase of Ancient Thought* (New York: Cosmos, 1949), 98; E. R. Dodds, in Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (*El. theol.*), ed. and tr. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xix-xx and esp. 209; D. Gregory MacIsaac, "The Origin of Determination in the Neoplatonism of Proclus," in *Divine Creation in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought: Essays Presented to the Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse*, ed. Michael Treschow,

Thus being itself is the monad of beings, life itself is the monad of living things, intellect itself the monad of cognitive things, and so on. This pattern applies not only to hypostatic levels like being, life, and intellect, but also to narrower terms within these levels, including all the Platonic forms or ideas. As a universal rule, "It is necessary that in each genus there be that which is unmixed with what is inferior so that there may be that which is mixed, just as we say with regard to the forms…In general, in every case [συνόλως παντaχοῦ], whatever each being is [τὸ ὅπερ ὂν ἕκαστον, i.e., that which just is the character in question] precedes the things which by diminution are mixed with the privations of themselves."[5] Thus in the *Elements of Theology*, illustrating the principle that what is primal in every order must be numerically one, Proclus offers as examples of monads not only "being," "intellect," and "soul," but also "each of the forms," "the beautiful," "the equal," "living thing," and "man." "For," he concludes, "the demonstration is the same."[6] As he regularly observes, in every case, wherever many things share a common character, they must be reduced to a monad which is just that character, as Plato would say, "itself by itself."[7] By means of this reasoning Proclus articulates a complex, multi-tiered array of unparticipated monadic terms, ontologically prior to sensible particulars and posterior to the absolutely simple first principle or one itself.

Aquinas and his present-day followers therefore rightly understand Proclus' doctrine of monads to be a development of Plato's "theory of ideas," intended as an explanation of sameness-in-difference, that is, of how many different things can be the same in some way. In Plato's words, "We are accustomed to posit some one form for each many to which we apply the same

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Willemien Otten, and Walter Hannam (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 143 n. 8.

5 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* (*Plat. theol.*) (*Théologie platonicienne*, 6 vols., ed. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink [Paris: Belles Lettres, 2003]), 2 3, 30.14-22.

6 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (*El. theol.*), ed. and tr. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 22, 26.16-21.

7 See, e.g., *Plat. theol.* 2 3, 30.20-22; 3 2, 10.15-18; 3 4, 14.19-22.

name."[8] Reading his Procline sources (chiefly Pseudo-Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*) through the lens of Aristotle's tendentious criticisms of this theory, Aquinas interprets Proclus' monads, such as being, life, and intellect, as well as ideas of natural kinds and even the monadic principles of accidents such as white and black, as hypostatized Aristotelian universals, conceptual abstractions erroneously objectified as real beings outside the soul.[9] On this reading, they constitute a series of subsistent ideas, separate both from thought and from sensible things, hierarchically ordered according to their degrees of universality: in the words of Norris Clarke, "the vast hierarchic procession of reified universal concepts—the Porphyrian tree transplanted into reality—so characteristic of the whole Platonic tradition (at least in its Aristotelian interpretation), dominated by the primacy of form and the ultra-realism of ideas."[10] These ideas are taken to be a multiplicity of really distinct "causes," so that, for example, Socrates is caused to be an animal by the idea of animal, to be human by the idea of man, and even to be white by "subsistent whiteness."[11]

8 *Republic* 10, 596a6-7.

9 For Aquinas' understanding of Platonic ideas as hypostatized abstract universals, see, e.g., *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 75, 8; *De substantiis separatis* 1, 4-5; *In de causis* 3. For the repetition of this reading by Thomists, see Little, *Platonic Heritage*, 45-50; L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1953), 85-88; R. J. Henle, *St. Thomas and Platonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 333-335, 351-358, 412.

10 W. Norris Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Platonism?" *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952): 191. The parenthetical aside indicates Clarke's recognition that this may not be a just account of "the whole Platonic tradition."

11 See, e.g., *De substantiis separatis* 11, 60; *In de causis* 3. Dodds, though no Thomist, interprets and criticizes Proclus' system in much the same way: "Its fundamental weakness seems to me to lie in the assumption that the structure of the cosmos exactly reproduces the structure of Greek logic…[I]n Proclus ontology becomes so manifestly the shadow of logic as to present what is almost a *reductio ad absurdum* of rationalism. In form a metaphysic of Being, the *Elements* [*of Theology*] embodies what is in substance a doctrine of categories: the cause is but a reflection of the 'because', and the Aristotelian apparatus of genus, species and differentia is transformed into an objectively conceived hierarchy of entities or forces" (*El. theol.*, xxv). Thus Dodds objects that "Pr[oclus] proceeds from analysis to hypostatization"

Aquinas himself regularly affirms the Platonic and Procline one-before-many principle, recognizing that wherever the same term is predicated of many things, there must be a prior, numerically one cause to account for their being the same. He repeatedly deploys this principle, expressly acknowledging its Platonic provenance, in arguing from the multiplicity of beings, that is, the many things that have or participate *esse*, to unparticipated *ipsum esse* as the cause of all beings in that they are beings, which he thus identifies as the first principle or God.[12] His difference with the Platonists lies in the ontological status of these "ones." As if folding up a telescope, Aquinas collapses Proclus' many-tiered system of terms and levels into God as *ipsum esse*. Like Proclus' first principle, the God of Aquinas is subsistent one and good, since these perfections are common to absolutely all things. But he also, without distinction, subsumes the role of the Procline triad of being,[13] life, and intellect.[14] Likewise, since *ipsum esse* is the exemplar or exemplary cause of which all things, as participants of *esse*, are similitudes, God may be said to contain a plurality of ideas in the sense that he is and knows himself as the exemplar of many different things.[15] This, Aquinas observes, to some degree "saves" or "preserves" Plato's theory of ideas.[16] But these ideas are not really distinct from one another in God, and so do not violate the necessary simplicity of the first principle: each of them just is God, the divine essence or *esse* itself, known to himself as the exemplar of this or that being.

(*El. theol.*, 247), and charges Neoplatonism in general with a "leap from logic to ontology"(*El. theol.*, 195). See also Fabro, "Overcoming," 97-98 (citing Dodds).

12 E.g., *Summa theologiae* 1, 44, 1, resp.; *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* 1, 3, 5.

13 There is room for considerable terminological confusion here. Aquinas' *esse*, as the perfection by which all beings are beings, corresponds not to Proclus' being (ὄν), but to his one or good. Conversely, Proclus' being, or that-which-is, corresponds not to Aquinas' *esse* but to his *ens*. See Perl, "Lessened by Addition," 708-713.

14 See Wayne J. Hankey, *God in Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the* Summa Theologiae (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 103-106.

15 *Summa theologiae* 1, 15, 2, resp. See also *Summa theologiae* 1, 44, 3, resp.

16 *Summa contra gentiles* 1, 54, 5.

Even accidents like 'white,' in that they are modalities of *esse*, are virtually contained without distinction in God as *esse* itself.

According to the story as regularly told by Thomists, Aquinas thus "corrects" Proclus and the Platonists by eliminating any ontologically intermediate terms, such as subsistent life itself, subsistent intellect itself, subsistent ideas of natural kinds such as man and horse, and subsistent ideas of accidents such as white, between God and sensible particulars.[17] Aquinas' doctrine of God as *ipsum esse* has indeed been celebrated for uniting the Aristotelian rejection of self-subsistent universals, separate from particulars and from one another not only in thought but in reality, with the Platonic insight that ontologically prior, transcendent exemplarity is necessary for the intelligibility of the world.[18] The debate between Aquinas and the Platonists,

17 See the works listed above, n. 3. Vincent A. Guagliardo gives a succinct account in his introduction to Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, tr. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard Taylor (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), xxvi-xxviii: "Another Platonic position [that Thomas 'corrects'] is that abstract universals as prior self-subsisting forms are the cause not only of our knowledge of things but also of the very things that participate them. St. Thomas accepts the Platonic principle that, wherever there exists a many having some form in common, there must be a one that is their source and explanation. But he consistently rejects the 'position' that the Platonists drew from it: that there is a first, self-subsisting idea or form for every class of being in which others exhibiting that form participate. Instead, St. Thomas places all such ideas in God as the first efficient, exemplary, and final cause of things… In this context, the role of intermediary Platonic ideas hierarchically arranged according to greater universality or commonality between the One and the many as what the many variously participate, is 'corrected' by being eliminated…The doctrine of the triad of being, life, and intelligence…is 'corrected' by St. Thomas through his use of Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle. He places this triad formally in God alone as the very 'nature' of God as the one who alone is being, life, and intelligence 'essentially.'"

18 See Little, *Platonic Heritage*, 42, and 50-51: "The question…is not so much to explain the unity of the universal as to explain what explains that unity, the community of nature of the singulars in which it is founded…[S]imilarity, [St. Thomas] insists, can only be found in effects that at least remotely derive from one origin. Unity in the effects, even if only unity of species, demands unity of cause. It should now be evident that St. Thomas is here recalling a doctrine of Plato's, rejected by Aristotle, to complete Aristotle's doctrine. Aristotle did not and could not admit a universal *ante rem* in any way. Thomas admitting it rejoins Plato. But…he opposes Plato's subsistent universals and puts the universal *ante rem* in

then, turns not on the one-before-many principle itself, which both accept, but rather on the question of whether or in what sense these "ones," or in Proclus' terms monads, must be really distinct from each other and therefore not only prior to particulars but also distinct from and posterior to the first principle.

II

To understand Proclus' position, we must begin by observing that Platonic ideas and Procline monads are not, and never were, reified or hypostatized universals. (Will that delusion *ever* be put to rest?) A universal, in Aristotelian terms, is that which is "said," that is, predicated, of many. We may say of many things, for example, that each is white, or that each is a man. We then "abstract" what is said of the many: that is, we think or conceive the character 'white' or 'man' without attending to the differences between the many white things or the many humans. Thus we come to have a universal concept, 'white' or 'man.' Because such a concept is just the character or nature common to many different things, considered without regard to any of those particulars, its name refers univocally to that character. Thus Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle, says that "the Platonists posit two men, one sensible, which is corruptible, and one separate, which is incorruptible, which they call the species or idea of man. But they say that the species or idea is the same in species, according to the Platonists, with singulars. And the name of the species is not predicated equivocally of the species and of the singular."[19] The error of the

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the divine mind…Thomas needs the universal *ante rem* in God…to explain how several real things *can* possess a common nature." Cf. Fabro, "Overcoming," 105.

19 *Sententia libri metaphysicae* 10, 12, 9. See Geiger, *Participation*, 88 n. 3; Little, *Platonic Heritage*, 44. Aquinas has no objection to separate ideas existing not univocally but eminently, in a way superior to the forms of particulars, in a separate substance, that is, an intellect, angelic or divine. "It belongs to the account [*ratione*] of man that it is in matter, and thus man cannot be found without matter. Although therefore this [i.e., this particular] is man by participation of the species, nonetheless it cannot be reduced to something existing by itself in the same species, but to a superexcellent species, as are separate substances. And the same account applies to other sensible things" (*Summa theologiae* 1, 44, 3, ad 2). But for Aquinas

Platonists, we are told, is to regard these abstract universals as real things, called "ideas," subsisting by themselves "outside the soul," separate from the many things of which they are predicated.[20]

Platonic ideas, however, are not hypostatized universal concepts or predicates, but are rather the ontological condition for the possibility of universal predication.[21] To predicate a universal term such as 'white' or 'man' univocally of many things, is to say that these things really are the same in this respect. But the attribute in each of the many things is numerically distinct from the same attribute in the others. White, for example, as an attribute of this sheet of paper, is not, as Plato would say, "white itself by itself," or as Proclus would put it, "only white," but is rather white-in-this-paper. As such it belongs uniquely to this paper, is conditioned by so belonging, does not exist apart from or prior to the paper, and is distinct from white-in-anything-else. This is what might be termed an "Aristotelian" form (in this case an accidental, not a substantial form), or what Neoplatonists call an "enmattered form" (ἔνυλον εἶδος). But if these individuated forms are numerically distinct from each other and each is unique to the thing that has it, how then are they all the same, that is, all white, so that 'white' can be predicated truly and univocally of these many different things? It cannot be our classificatory act that makes them the same, for in that case there would be no truth in our calling them all white, no justification in the things themselves for such classification. In order for universal predication to express any truth of things, the sameness that it expresses must ultimately be reducible to identity, and thus to a numerically single term. Since the individuated

intelligible ideas in the angelic intellects have no causal role (see *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, 2, 3, 3, 2, ad 1: *non ita quod sint operativae*), while in the divine intellect they have such a role but are not really distinct from one another.

20 For Aquinas' interpretation of Platonic ideas as universals subsisting outside the soul (*extra animam*), see, e.g., *Summa contra gentiles* 2, 75, 8; *Summa theologiae* 1, 76, 2, ad 4; *De spiritualibus creaturis* 9, resp. and ad 6; *Sententia de sensu* 1, 15, 6.

21 See Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 226-228.

forms in the many are not numerically identical with each other, that term must therefore be distinct from all of them. Thus Plato distinguishes between a form "in us" or "that we have" and a form "itself" or "in nature."[22] Each of the forms-in-things, the individuated or "Aristotelian" forms, is a given character as it appears in, that is, as an attribute of, this or that particular. In order that the many particulars may all be really the same in this respect, these attributes must all be appearances of one reality: "Each [form] is one, but appearing everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each appears many."[23] In that each of the appearances is limited by "association" with a different thing, they are not simply identical with each other or with the "one" form, but they are all the same in that they are distinct appearances, or images, of one original, or paradigm.

This paradigm cannot be merely an abstract concept, existing only in this or that human mind as the product of that mind's act of abstraction, for in that case the many would not really be the same and the univocal predication would not be true. It must be prior, not posterior, to the many, as that which accounts for them all being humans, or all being white, so that they can truly be classed together and a universal concept abstracted from them in the first place. The paradigm itself, then, is not a hypostatized universal, but is rather the ontological condition for universal predication. The alternative to this conclusion is the nominalist denial that such predication expresses any truth, that different things really are the same in any way, and therewith the collapse of all intelligibility. In Plato's words, "If someone will not admit that there are forms of beings…, nor mark some form of each one, he will not have anywhere to turn his thought, as he does not admit an idea of each of beings which is always the same, and thus he altogether destroys the power of discourse."[24]

22 *Parmenides* 130b4; *Phaedo* 102d6–7, 103b5.

23 *Republic* 5, 476a5-7.

24 *Parmenides* 135b5-c2. Commenting on this passage, Proclus observes that

Proclus develops Plato's distinction between a form "in us" or "that we have" and a form "itself" or "in nature" into his distinction between a multiplicity of participated terms, that is, a given character as it belongs to each of many different things, and an unparticipated monad, that is, the same character "by itself," unconditioned by belonging to anything.

> For the unparticipated, having the status of a monad, as belonging to itself and not to something else [lit., as of itself and not of an other] and as transcending the participants, generates the terms that can be participated…But every participated term, coming to belong to [lit., be of] something else by which it is participated, is secondary to that which is present to all likewise and has filled them all from itself. For that which is in one is not in the others; but that which is present to all alike, in order that it may illuminate them all, is not in one, but is prior to them all.[25]

The principle that there must be a monad prior to every multiplicity extends throughout Proclus' entire system, all the way from 'one itself' which is the first principle of all things precisely because all things whatsoever have the character one,[26] down through being, life, and intellect, to paradigmatic ideas of genera such as living thing and of species such as man or horse, and even, as we shall see, to accidents such as black and white. Proclus' doctrine of monads thus follows from an affirmation, not a denial, of Aristotle's insistence that there can be nothing numerically one that belongs to all of the many particulars: each has its own participated or individuated attribute. It is precisely because the participated terms are not identical with each other, but each belongs uniquely to its participant, that it is necessary to posit

what is derived from sense-perception is not prior but posterior to sensible things and their common characters: Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* (*In Parm.*), 3 vols., ed. Carlos Steel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007-2009), 5, 980.9-11. Hence the idea or monad that accounts for what is common to many things, that is, the many participated terms, so that a concept can be abstracted from the experience of them, cannot itself be the hypostatization of such a concept.

25 *El. theol.* 23, 26.25–34.

26 For this argumentation see *Plat. theol.* 2 3, 23.15-30.26.

the unparticipated monad to account for the many non-identical participated terms being the same, so that many things are univocally white, or humans, or horses.[27] For Proclus as for Plato, the multiplicity of participated terms are differentiated appearances of the unparticipated monad: "The things that are uniformly and enfoldedly in the monad appear [ἀναφαίνεται] dividedly in the offspring of the monad."[28] The participated terms are therefore distinct from the monad as many appearances are distinct from that of which they are appearances, or as images from their archetype.

Unlike an abstract concept, therefore, an unparticipated monad is not univocal with its participated multiplicity. A univocal white that does not belong to any surface, a univocal man (i.e., human-ness) which is not that of any flesh and bones—in short, an enmattered form without matter—is an obvious contradiction in terms. But a Platonic idea or a Procline monad, as that of which the many participated terms are appearances, cannot be univocal with them. If Socrates is reflected in many mirrors and we predicate the name 'Socrates' both of each reflection and of Socrates himself, this does not mean that Socrates himself is another reflection, subsisting without any mirror. 'Socrates' is not said univocally of the reflections and of the original: they are called by the same name only in that the former are appearances of the latter. So too, the unparticipated monad 'man' is precisely not the character 'man' as it appears and is known in any and every human being, but is rather the principle or source of that character, the paradigm of which 'man' in every human being is an image. Thus Proclus explains that we neither know nor ask what a monad is in itself, but only infer it as the source, or "fount" (πηγή), of the many participated terms: "The beautiful itself is the henad of all beautiful things and the primally beautiful, and the equal itself is the henad of all equal things and the primally equal; nor do

27 Cf. A. C. Lloyd, "Procession and Division in Proclus," in *Soul and the Structure of Being in Late Neoplatonism: Syrianus, Proclus, and Simplicius*, ed. H. J. Blumethal and A. C. Lloyd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), 25-26.

28 *Plat. theol.* 3 2, 8.12–14.

we enquire about these what the beautiful itself is, but we know that it is the fount of the beautiful things, and we consider this sufficient."[29] These "fontal" monads, then, are not hypostatized universals or common natures, univocal with the participated attributes that are found in each and all of the many, but are rather the paradigmatic causes of which the latter are images or appearances. Proclus' elaborate hierarchy of ideas, causes, or monads is therefore not a system of hypostatized abstractions, an unjustified projection of logic into ontology or "the Porphyrian tree transplanted into reality," but rather the condition for there being any intelligibility to the world, any sameness in different things from which abstract concepts could be derived in the first place.

But in order to ground such intelligibility, these monads must be distinct from one another, and therefore distinct from and posterior to the absolutely simple first principle. It is precisely here that Proclus locates the difference and opposition between his own doctrine and that of the Peripatetics, who affirm a divine intellect but deny any distinction of ideas within it and therefore fail to distinguish it from the first principle:

> For others too say that there is an intellect prior to the cosmos, and name it God, but they do not say that there are ideas; for they do not accept that it has distinct [διωρισμένας] causes of things in the world, forms of man and horse and lion and whatever others there are among mortal things. In this respect then those who deny and those who posit forms differ from each other, insofar as the latter admit distinguished [διακεκριμένας] intellective, changeless, and divine causes, while the former say that there is some one, single, unmultiplied, changeless cause, as desired: what *we* say about the cause established above intellect and the intelligible number, this

29 *In Parm.* 6, 1108.24-28. This is one of a number of places where Proclus seemingly departs from his own technical terminology and says 'henad' where the correct term would be 'monad.' For a comparable example, in which he refers to the Gods as monads instead of henads, see *Plat. theol.* 3 6, 20.2. One is tempted to suspect textual corruption in such passages: perhaps not merely scribal error in the usual sense, but conceptual confusion on the part of copyists who are not deeply immersed in the terminological apparatus of late Athenian Neoplatonism. See P. A. Meijer, "Participation in Henads and Monads in Proclus' *Theologia Platonica* III, Chs. 1-6," in *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 80-81.

> *they* attribute to intellect. In that they consider the first [to be] such, they judge rightly…But in that they take intellect and the one to be identical, [they judge] not rightly.[30]

This passage could well be read as a proleptic criticism of Aquinas' conflation of all the Procline monads and ideas into his God, who is both *ipsum esse*, corresponding to Proclus' one itself above being as the absolutely simple first principle of all things,[31] and the divine intellect containing exemplars of all things, thus to some extent "preserving" Plato's ideas. As Proclus explains, since these monads are the principles of different orders of things, they must be distinct from one another. Each class, each multiplicity of things which are in some way the same, must have its own prior monad, distinct from the monad of any other multiplicity. This rule obtains from the most comprehensive terms, such as being, life, and intellect, all the way down to the finest levels of articulation, such as the parts and accidents of sensible things. The monad of life, for instance, must be distinct from the monad of being, in order to ground the real difference of living beings, as a class, from non-living beings. Again, man and horse must be distinct from each other at some level prior to sensible particulars, to explain how Socrates and Plato are both humans and not horses, while Bucephalus and Incitatus are both horses and not humans. The participated forms 'man' in Plato and in Socrates are two images, or appearances, of one paradigm, man itself, while the participated forms 'horse' in Bucephalus and in Incitatus are two images of another paradigm, horse itself. Otherwise, humans and horses would not be really distinct in species. As Proclus argues, these distinct monads are a necessary condition for definition, demonstration, and division.[32] "If, then, there are not forms, neither will there be in us λόγοι of

30 *In Parm.* 4, 972.29-973-12. Cf. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists,* 223 n. 57: "The crucial dispute between Plato and Aristotle is whether there are real… distinctions within incorporeal reality."

31 See, e.g., Aquinas, *In de causis* 6: "The first cause is above being [*supra ens*] insofar as it is infinite *esse* itself."

32 *In Parm.* 5, 982.7-24.

things; and if there are not λόγοι of things in us, there will not be the dialectical methods by which we know beings…For this power of the soul, above all, seeking for the cause, takes refuge in the forms and monads that are generative of the many."[33]

Consequently, immediately after castigating the Peripatetics for their conflation of intellect and the one, Proclus continues:

> It is then above all characteristic of the eidetic cause to be distinguished [διακεκριμένον] according to the multiplicity of beings…Where being is hiddenly and without distinction there is not yet form; and where there first is distinction, there are the first of the forms, such as one of celestial things[34] and again another of aerial things and another of footed things; and where there is distinction of more things, there stand forth certain particular paradigmatic causes of more partial things; and as the formative ordering proceeds to the end, the last of the productive forms contain distinguished [διακεκριμένας] causes even of parts and of accidents; for the λόγοι in nature possess distinct [διωρισμένας] principles of eye and foot and finger and heart.[35]

Thus being itself or the one-being is the monad of being, the fount of all beings insofar as they are beings; life itself is the fount of all living things, *qua* living, as distinct from non-living things; intellect is the fount of all cognitive things, *qua* cognitive; and so on through all Proclus' levels of causality down to the level of nature, where we find the λόγοι which are the principles of accidents such as black and—to take Aquinas' favorite example—white. Asking whether there are ideas for accidents, Proclus explains that some accidents, such as beauty, health, and virtue, are perfective of substances and as such do indeed have "paradigmatic causes." Other accidents "subsist in substances, but do not complete or perfect them, such as whiteness, blackness, and all such." Accidents of the latter kind

33 *In Parm.* 5, 982.24-32.

34 Following Morrow and Dillon, I omit from translation the word πᾶν, which makes no sense and appears to be an error. See *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's* Parmenides, tr. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 320. Perhaps the text should read πάντων, "one [form] of all celestial things."

35 *In Parm.* 4, 973.12-22.

"are generated according to a λόγον, and the mixing of bodies is not sufficient for their generation, but a form enters into them from nature, though not according to a distinguished intellective cause…For nature, receiving the order of forms proceeding into [bodily] masses, distinguishes wholes from parts and substances from accidents, unfolding by her dividing powers the things that previously are united and partless."[36] *Pace* Aquinas, then, there is and must be one "subsistent whiteness," not, to be sure, as an idea in Proclus' strict sense, but as a λόγος in nature, prior to the many white things, to account for them all being the same in that they are all white. Thus we return to Proclus' strict logical insistence that there must be a monad or one prior to the many "in every case," because, as he says, "the demonstration is the same." All these terms must be both prior to sensible particulars and posterior to the absolutely simple first principle: prior to particulars as the condition for their having any intelligibility or being anything at all, and posterior to the first principle in that they are mutually distinct, determinate, and multiple. Hence they constitute an intermediate realm, a series of levels and terms, ontologically "in between" sensible particulars and the first principle.

III

Aquinas takes this conclusion to mean that according to the Platonists, "the thing understood," that is, each intelligible monad, "is outside the soul like a thing which is seen."[37] Much the same reading underlies Dodds's objection that Proclus regards logical categories such as genus and species as "an objectively conceived hierarchy of entities or forces."[38] Thus Procline terms such as being, life, intellect, and all other monads become caricatured as a series of "things" or "objects," mysteriously hovering in some "place" between the world and the first principle, apart from both sensible

36 *In Parm.* 3, 826.21-827.7

37 *De spiritualibus creaturis* 9, ad 6.

38 Above, n. 11.

particulars and any cognitive apprehension. Such interpretations reflect the presupposition that monads are reified universals and as such are univocal with their participated multiplicities, so that they are all "things" in the same sense. But the relation between a multiplicity and its monad is not that of univocal things to one another, but rather that of many appearances to that of which they are appearances, or of images to their paradigm. The entire Procline hierarchy must be understood in these terms: not as a univocal series of objects, but as levels of appearance or manifestation of the same content. For a visual metaphor, we should imagine, not a series of things stacked one atop another, but rather an array of mirrors passing on reflections of reflections from one to another. "Everything which by existing provides to others[39] itself primally is that which it imparts to the recipients."[40] It is not a hierarchy of univocal objects, but rather these levels of manifestation, each in its own way having the intelligibility of all things as its content, that lie "in between" sensible particulars and the first principle.

"Manifestation" or "appearance" is a phenomenological category, necessarily implying what phenomenologists term a "dative of appearance," the awareness to and in which the manifestation is given. Hence Proclus' monads, although prior both to human conceptualization and to sensible things, are not therefore separate from any cognitive apprehension whatsoever. The assumption that if the monads are not merely abstract concepts but realities, ontologically prior to sensible particulars, then they must be "outside the soul" or apart from any cognition, presupposes an extrinsic duality between thought and being, such that what is real is "objective" and thus "outside" or apart from thought, while what exists only "in" or as the content of thought is "subjective" and hence not real. But in the Platonic metaphysics of manifestation, where being just is what is given to thought and thought just is the apprehension of being, no such extrinsic

39 Or, "Everything which provides existence to others…" This is the MSS reading. The text as quoted above reflects Dodds's conjectural emendation.

40 *El. theol.* 18, 20.3-4.

duality obtains. Rather, every level of reality is the content (not the "object") of some mode of cognitive apprehension, and every level of cognitive apprehension is the possession of reality in some way. Thus all the levels in Proclus' elaborate ontological hierarchy are neither "subjective," as if they were merely the psychic products of individual human thought, nor "objective," as if they were a series of univocal things existing in separation from any cognition. Rather, they are found within thought, not indeed as mere concepts, but as the contents of the higher modes of cognitive apprehension which are in the soul as the necessary conditions for lower, properly human thought. In Book I of the *Platonic Theology* Proclus makes it quite clear that all the levels of reality that the treatise will examine in such profusion and detail are found not outside but rather within the soul itself:

> The soul, entering into itself, will behold all other things, and God… When the soul looks at the things posterior to itself it looks at the shadows and images of beings, but when it reverts itself to itself it unfolds its own substance and its own λόγους. And at first it is as if it beholds itself alone, but going deeper into knowledge of itself it finds in itself both intellect and the orders of beings, and going into its interior and as it were the sanctum of the soul, by this means it contemplates with closed eyes the genus of the Gods and the henads of beings.[41]

What the soul finds within itself, then, is not merely "itself alone," an individual human subject possessing concepts abstracted from sense-images, but higher and higher, or deeper and deeper, modes of cognition, possessing as their content,

41 *Plat. theol.* 1 3, 15.22-16.16. This does not contradict Proclus' rejection of Plotinus' doctrine that part of the soul remains undescended. To say that "intellect and the orders of beings" are found within the soul is not to say that they are a part of what the soul itself is. Proclus distinguishes between the soul "itself alone" and that which "it finds in itself" but which transcends and is not itself. Cf. *In Parm.* 4, 945.2-6: "For the intellective [forms], although they transcend us, yet since we derive immediately from them are somehow in us, and we have knowledge of them, and through them of the unknowable excellence of the more divine things." In the present passage he is only concerned to deny that intelligible reality and the Gods are outside the soul like sensible things, not to identify them with the soul or the soul with them.

each in its own way, the ideas and monads that are the necessary conditions for sensible things to have any intelligibility at all. These levels, therefore, are at once levels of reality prior to sensible particulars, and levels of cognition that transcend the thinking of the individual human soul. They can neither be reduced to concepts with no ontological priority to sensibles, nor objectified as univocal things set apart from any cognition.

Thus Proclus regularly observes that all the levels—being, life, intellect, and so on—are not a series of different, mutually univocal objects, but are rather the same thing, that is, the intelligible content of all things, according to higher and lower modes of manifestation or cognitive possession. So, for example, intelligible intellect or the living-thing-itself (αὐτοζῷον), that is, the multiplicity of distinct intelligible beings or forms, and intelligible being or the one-being from which they proceed, are not two mutually univocal things, as if intelligible being were, as Aquinas supposes, a universal concept "being" considered in abstraction from the multiplicity of beings and then hypostatized as another thing separate from and additional to them. Rather, intelligible being is all things "hiddenly," that is, just as being or that-which-is, prior to the diminutions by which they are distinguished as a multiplicity of forms.[42] Intelligible intellect, in turn, is all things "manifestly," that is, as a multiplicity of distinct forms, which are being with distinguishing diminutions whereby each of them is *a* being and therefore less than just being itself. "In this [i.e., intelligible intellect], then, the forms are primally. For the distinction of intelligibles manifests the order of forms, wherefore the form is some being, but not simply being."[43] Only at this level do these forms constitute the paradigm of the cosmos, because, as we have seen, the paradigmatic function of forms requires that they be distinct from one another. "For of the things that the forms establish dividedly, being [i.e., the one-being] is the transcendent cause, and

42 *Plat. theol.* 3 9, 39.3-4; 3 12, 45.8.

43 *Plat. theol.* 3 14, 51.20-22.

of the things that being produces collectively [ἀθρόως], of these the forms are the cause in a distinguished way [διακεκριμένως], wherefore the forms are called paradigms of beings, while being is the cause of all things posterior to it, but not their paradigm; for paradigms are causes of things which are distinguished in existence and have characters different in essence."[44] In between intelligible being and intelligible intellect we find intelligible life, which again is not another thing but the same thing, that is, all things, at an intermediary level of manifestation, *in via*, as it were, from the one-being which is all things hiddenly to the paradigm which is all things manifestly. The one-being "is all things causally and, as we have often said, hiddenly; but [intelligible life] shows forth [προφαίνει] multiplicity and proceeds from the union of being into manifestation; and [intelligible intellect] is now [i.e., actually, itself] the intelligible multiplicity and the order of intelligible forms."[45] Thus, "the first triad [i.e., intelligible being] is all things, but intelligibly and unitarily," while "the second triad [i.e., intelligible life] is all things, but vitally,"[46] and the third triad, or intelligible intellect, "is all things in actuality and manifestly."[47] Intelligible being, intelligible life, and intelligible intellect, therefore, are not three univocal objects, but are the same thing—that is, all things, the entire content of reality—according to different modes or levels of manifestation and apprehension.

So too, many levels further down, intellective intellect, which Proclus identifies as Zeus or the demiurge, is intellectively the same things that intelligible intellect or the paradigm is intelligibly. "Intellective intellect…subsists analogous to intelligible [intellect] and is conjoined to it and is filled from it, possessing intellectively the things which are in that intelligibly,"[48] and "Zeus, being an

44 *Plat. theol.* 3 14, 52.1-7.

45 *Plat. theol.* 3 12, 46.7-10.

46 *Plat. theol.* 3 13, 47.2-6.

47 *Plat. theol.* 3 14, 49.23.

48 *Plat. theol.* 3 21, 75.8-11.

intellective living thing, is united to the intelligible living thing, and receiving procession analogous to that, establishes intellectively all things which proceed intelligibly in that…Zeus is intelligibly in the all-complete living thing, and the all-complete living thing is intellectively in Zeus."[49] Intellective intellect or the demiurge thus possesses the same forms as intelligible intellect or the paradigm, but with the diminutions whereby they are not merely the generic forms of the four principal classes of living things, celestial, aerial, aquatic, and terrestrial, but the specific forms of the various kinds of living things in the cosmos.[50] "It is everywhere characteristic of intellect to divide and manifest multiplicities… Intellective intellect originates all division and the establishment of partial things, since it pre-establishes in itself the multiplicity of forms, and not tetradically only, as does intelligible intellect, but possesses one all-complete intellective cause of all forms."[51] This is precisely why intellective intellect is the demiurgic level: the possession of specific forms is necessary for and characteristic of the intellection that "crafts" the cosmos with all the different species that it contains.[52] Still further down, as we have seen, accidents such as black and white, which are not distinguished at the intellective or demiurgic level, are "unfolded" or manifest as distinct λόγοι at the level of nature. In short, each level "down" consists of the multiple, articulated appearances of its superior, and each level "up" is that of which they are appearances. Hence all the levels are the same content, the intelligibility of all things, given and possessed in more and less comprehensive ways, with varying degrees of division or diminution.

Proclus offers an exceptionally clear account of how the monad man, for example, is not an "object" that exists and can be found

49 *Plat. theol.* 5 27, 100.14-16, 101.19-20. See also *Plat theol.* 5 30, 112.1-22.

50 *Plat. theol.* 3 15, 53.10-15. See Jan Opsomer, "Deriving the Three Intelligible Triads from the *Timaeus*," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (Leuven and Paris: University Press and Belles Lettres, 2000), 371.

51 *Plat. theol.* 5 12, 41.7-10, 14-18.

52 See *Plat. theol.* 5 17, 62.12-22; 5 20, 75.2-5; 5 22, 81.5-11; 5 30, 111.18-21.

only at the level of intellective intellect, but rather occurs and is known in a different way at every level. "And so, the first cognition of man among the Gods is as being [ὡς ὄντος], and it is one intellection that knows all being as one according to one unity." This refers to the level of the one-being, where all intelligibles are known just as being and hence without distinction from one another. Here therefore man is and is known, not as one distinct kind of being, but just as being. Proclus continues: "The second [cognition of man], is as always being; for this cognition uniformly embraces all that always is according to one cause." This is the level of eternity or intelligible life, at which level man is known as always existing, without distinction from all other things that always exist. "The [cognition of man] after this, is as animal; for this in turn thinks animal according to unity. The one after this, as belonging under a certain genus, for instance as footed; for there is one intellection of all that genus as one, and the division [comes] first upon this, and variety after simplicity." At this level, that of intelligible intellect, the forms of the four primary genera of living things are distinguished, but not specific forms within these. Here therefore man is known, not as a distinct kind of terrestrial animal, but just as terrestrial animal: "But all the same neither is there intellection of man at this point only; for it is not the same to think all the terrestrial as one thing, and [to think] man." Finally, "Among the demiurgic and in general intellective forms, then, there is also an intellection of man as man, because this form too is distinguished from the others in these orders."[53] Thus it is only at the level of intellective intellect or the demiurge that the idea man is manifest *as* man, distinct from ideas of other terrestrial animals. The one intelligible reality man, then, is and is known *as being* at the level of intelligible being or the one-being. The same intelligible reality is and is known *as living* at the level of intelligible life or eternity, *as terrestrial animal* at the level of intelligible intellect or the paradigm, and *as man* at the level of intellective intellect or the

53 *In Parm.* 4, 960.11-24.

demiurge. We said earlier that man and horse must be really distinct at some level prior to sensible particulars. Here Proclus tells us at exactly what level: not that of being, for in that respect man and horse are not different; nor that of life, for the same reason; nor that of intelligible intellect, for neither are they different *qua* terrestrial animals; but that of intellect proper or intellective intellect.

Proclus' monads, ideas, and λόγοι, then, are not a series of mutually extrinsic objects, separate both from one another and from any cognitive apprehension, as if being were one thing, life another, man another, white yet another, and so on. Rather, man, horse, and lion at the level of being just are being, and being at the level of demiurgic intellect just is man, horse, and lion. We could say likewise that accidents such as black and white at the level of being just are being, and that being at the level of nature is the λόγοι of black, white, etc. This is the true meaning of Proclus' famous dictum, "All things are in all things, but in each in its own way."[54] Taken at face value, this suggests that "all things" is at it were a *tertium quid* which is found in one way in being and in another way in life; or more precisely, a *quartum quid* found intelligibly in being, vitally in life, and intellectively in intellect. But there is no *tertium* or *quartum quid*, something other than being, life, and intellect which is found differently in each. The dictum really means, "Each thing *is* all things, in its own way": being is all things intelligibly, life is all things vitally, intellect is all things intellectively. Hence it is not the case, as Aquinas has it, that according to Proclus Socrates is caused to be human by the idea of man, to be an animal by the idea of animal, to be living by the idea of life, and to be a being by the idea of being, as if by four separate intelligible objects. Man, animal, life, and being are not four different things, but are the same thing according to different modes of possession. Just in that he is caused by man, therefore, Socrates is caused by animal, life, and being.

54 *El. theol.* 103, 93.13. See also *Plat. theol.* 5 15, 51.11.

> Everything produced by secondary things is in a greater way produced from the prior and more causal things from which the secondaries too were produced. For if the secondary has all its being [οὐσίαν, i.e., all that it is] from that which is prior to it, its power to produce is also from there…But if it receives its power to produce from its superior, it has from there its being a cause of the things of which it is the cause…And if so, the things too that proceed from it are caused through what is prior to it…But that they are in a greater way from there, is clear. For if it [i.e., the superior cause] gave to the secondary its causality of producing, it therefore primally possessed that same causality, and the secondary too generates through this, having received from there its power of generating secondarily.[55]

All these levels of causality, from the one-being down to nature, are prior to the appearing of this same intelligible content as the attributes of sensible things, in that they are the condition for sensible things to have any attributes and thus to have any intelligibility or be anything at all.

Ultimately this means that all such causality is not additional to but contained in that of the first principle from which all things derive. Just as the monad man does not provide to Socrates anything that is not provided by animal, and animal does not provide anything that is not provided by being, so none of the monads provides anything that is not provided by the first principle or one itself. In this way, for Proclus no less than for Aquinas, all things proceed wholly, immediately, and "indifferently" or "likewise" from the absolutely simple first principle.[56] All of Proclus' subordinate or "intermediary" terms add nothing to the undifferentiated causality of one itself, because they are themselves nothing but the articulation, by diminution, of that very causality.[57] All the intelligibility of all things consists

55 *El. theol.* 56, 55.5-22; cf. *In Parm.* 4, 952.29-31.

56 *Plat. theol.* 2 7, 50.10; 2 12, 72.17. See Perl, "Lessened by Addition," 695.

57 Cf. Jean Trouillard, "Procession néoplatonicienne et création judéo-chrétienne," in *Néoplatonisme: Mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard* (Fontenay aux Roses: Les Cahiers de Fontenay, 1981), 12: "D'après le néoplatonisme, la communication du pouvoir processif n'est pas telle que l'Un cesserait d'agir ou qu'il n'agirait qu'indirectement à travers ses dérivés sans leur être immédiatement présent. En réalité, l'Un est toujours immédiatement opérant, parce que toute efficacité

in their distinct ways of participating one, just as, for Aquinas, it consists in their ways of participating *esse*. Proclus' first principle or one itself, therefore, no less than Aquinas' *ipsum esse* or God, is all the monads without distinction. "Much more greatly, then, that which possesses together all the perfections in one, and is not some good thing but good itself, and the super-full, if one may speak so, will be generative of the totalities and constitutive of them, producing all things by transcending all things, and by being unparticipated generating all things likewise, both the first and the last of beings."[58] Here Proclus and Aquinas are much closer together than the standard Thomist story allows. The first principle or one itself, like Aquinas' God, is the total and immediate cause of all things whatsoever, precontaining without distinction all the perfections of all things. But precisely as discrete moments in the unfolding of that causality, distinct monads, such as being, life, and intellect, man and horse, black and white, are prior to these characters as they appear in sensible particulars.[59] Thus they are neither abstract concepts, derived from sense-perception and existing only within the thought of this or that human individual, nor objects subsisting outside of any thought. Rather, the soul finds them within itself as the contents of the higher levels of cognition that are the conditions at once for its own understanding and for the intelligibility of the world. As such they are prior to the world

est une modalisation de l'unité…Toute cause subordonnée joue à l'intérieur de la causalité plus compréhensive qui la soutient. L'efficacité dérivée emploie, en la particularisant, l'opération qui l'investit. La pensée détermine la vie, celle-ci particularise l'être, qui lui-même est une manière d'unité. Rien n'a de pouvoir que par la puissance omniprésente de l'unité unifiante. Le nombre des médiations n'y change rien."

58 *Plat. theol.* 2 7, 50.5-11.

59 See Vincent P. Branick, "The Unity of the Divine Ideas," *The New Scholasticism* 42 (1968), 201: "In a sense, [in Aquinas] the ideas have a horizontal relation to each other, but they have a vertical relation to God…[L]ike the radii of a circle, distant at the circumference but united in the center, the ideas unite in God." The simile is apt, and profoundly Neoplatonic: cf., e.g., Plotinus VI.8.18, 4-29. But it invites the question of what is represented by the area between the center and the circumference. It is precisely this region that Proclus is concerned to explore in detail.

and to the soul without being outside of or separate from thought.

The fundamental difference between Aquinas and Proclus, then, lies in the latter's Platonic insistence that monadic principles of different classes of things must be really distinct, at levels prior to human conceptualization, in order for the sensible world to have any intelligibility and for our thought of it to have any truth. But for Proclus, "real" does not mean "outside the soul" or "separate from thought." In distinguishing the monads from one another he is discerning the levels of intelligible reality, from the one-being down to the λόγοι of parts and accidents, that allow the world of sensible things to have any intelligibility and thus to be anything at all. As the grounds of the world's intelligibility they are prior to sensible things, but they are not therefore a series of objects "outside the soul like a thing which is seen," in between the first principle and particulars. Each and all are the same reality according to different modes of cognitive possession, univocal neither with sensible things nor with one another, and hence are neither separate from each other nor outside of thought. Rather, Proclus discovers within the soul higher levels of cognition, containing the distinct monads that are necessary conditions for the intelligibility of the world. The exploration of reality, in all its multi-tiered complexity, is an inner journey, a spiritual journey, a journey into the depths of the self.[60] For Proclus, as for Plato, "the truth of beings is always in the soul."[61]

60 Cf. Dominic J. O'Meara, "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, 278-290, esp. 289-290. O'Meara notes the affinity of Proclus with Plotinus in this regard. See also Dodds, *El. theol.*, 203: "[I]n Neoplatonism…the 'self' which is thus known is not an isolated individual, but contains *in potentia* the whole range of reality."

61 Plato, *Meno* 86b1-2.